

Bi-Town Economic Development Committee
Meeting Minutes
via Zoom
Thursday, February 4, 2021

Members present: Gretchen Havreluk, Vicki Capitani, Eric Durocher, Heidi Taylor, Ethan Schoonmaker, Christine Howe, Tracy Bartels, Adam Grinold

Also present: Shannon Wheeler, Jessica Lee Smith (8:56 join)

Meeting called to order at 8:03 am

- I. Additions or changes to the agenda: *None – but a Moover update was added*
- II. Approve minutes from the December 3rd meeting
 - a. Motion to approve by Eric, seconded by Gretchen. All approve.
- III. Deerfield Valley resiliency team
 - a. Gretchen: meeting on Tuesday. Efficiency Vermont has selected Dover, Wilmington, Wardsboro, and Whitingham as a target community. So free walk throughs will be available to maximize efficiency with some free products available. We'll be discussing how to roll that out. Working on touching base with all the businesses again and deciding how to expend remaining funds from towns.
 - b. Eric: haven't met since the new round of PPP was introduced so we're staying on top of that for the businesses to help them through this.
- IV. Our Growing Communities – Zoning
 - a. Gretchen: Wilmington planning commission chair resigned, Meg Staloff is Vice Chair and is regrouping.
 - b. Vicki: we just appointed new planning commissioners and increased the board to 5 plus an alternate and they're going to meet soon.
 - c. Eric will get the ACCD Zoning for Great Communities planning guide to the commission
- V. Housing Committee:
 - a. Eric: skipped January meeting but have been working on reaching out to local developers. Sent them a copy of housing plan, letter and flyer for Incremental Development webinar. Word has gotten out; I was contacted by someone with Mad River Housing Coalition and will meet with them next week. Short term rental market obviously affecting us, I'm working with a consultant on this. The short term market has grown 30% since Covid. Looking forward to sharing information from her with BiTown housing. Committee meeting next week.
 - b. Adam: this is under the Southern Vermont Economy Project so it's the USDA funded program that Sarah Lang runs through Bennington and Windham counties. The majority of funding came through them and some other state partners. The pilot host community is Rockingham. Amazing to see how simple tweaks in zoning can change the outlook for developers. They help shine the light on those items.
- VI. Marketing Committee:
 - a. Gretchen: held our joint Selectboard presentation. Working on what our budget will be so we can return to boards for funding. Having deep conversations with Chamber board about website redevelopment and staffing.
 - b. Eric: if you haven't checked out the reports yet they are on each town's website and Ethan/Heidi have sent out.
- VII. Other Business:
 - a. VTrans signs:
 - i. Gretchen: as reported in past, signs are up and I gave VTrans an update. I have contacted Wilmington Road Commissioner regarding Higley Hill Rd, Lake Raponda &

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Ray Hill Rd. They are working on this. We've changed language on websites as recommended and we have completed our checklist.

- ii. Vicki: wanted to check with Eric on if he contacted Newfane about this – he will do this.
- b. Walgreens:
 - i. Gretchen: hearing less on this but still think we should pursue this. I've reached out to the government relations manager 3 times now with no response. I have escalated it to legislators wanting to meet with him but no response. I think we need to have a keeper of information and are documenting the issues so we can forward to legislators or Secretary of State's office. I also recommend the people having issues contact the Secretary of State's office directly. Please let me know if you hear of people having problems.
 - ii. Eric: let's do a shared Google Doc so we can get an idea on what the scope of this issue is as we hear of things.
 - iii. Tracy: they are struggling with staffing like we all are and housing is a big issue for that. For this team, how can we work to support them. As an employer, it's a struggle to hire people so you can't provide the service you want to your customer. I think a lot goes back to housing and how to support these businesses.

VIII. Wilmington updates: (*Eric assumed Chair responsibilities as Heidi lost connection*)

- a. Gretchen: Wilmington Works received an AARP grant for Hayford Field and have purchased sleds and snowshoes. We did receive the LGER grant and have turned the majority of the business loans we made into grants. The Selectboard voted Tuesday to convert the remaining loan into a grant. In coordination with Wilmington Works we've been doing a Welcome Wagon program. We've been holding a virtual happy hours and have been having some pretty good numbers. I know the town is working heavily on the water district and are waiting on legislature vote. Working on the safety facility building and we've put out an RFP for North Main St sidewalks. Still struggling with State on East Main St project and easement slowdowns.

IX. Dover updates:

- a. Vicki: Set our Town Meeting date for Tuesday, May 18th and put together a subgroup of people to work on that. We've entered into an agreement with a lobbyist company to move the pupil weighting study forward. This is happening at the same time the state legislature is looking at it.
- b. Eric: we did complete our RFP and made a selection for our town website project. That contract has been signed with Municode for a complete redo of the site. We completed a call for applications for a formal Trails & Recreation committee and they meet next week. In process of regaining our village designations with help from Windham Regional Commission.

X. Mount Snow updates:

- a. Tracy: focusing on summer plans right now, should be able to share what's going to be open then by April meeting. Planning on golf and scenic chairlift rides again, we'll see what else. Winter operations: we are using Snow Lake Lodge for employee housing as we are so short on options. Hosted a couple of job fairs, not very successful. We're continuing to explore different avenues for staffing and will continue hiring through the season.

XI. Hermitage Club updates: *None in attendance*

XII. BDCC Updates:

- a. Adam: In additional to PPP you mentioned earlier, EIDL loan applicants are being contacted directly by FDA if they're eligible for additional funds. We're hearing this round of PPP is not overprescribed so it's important to reach out to those people. We've seen an uptick in inquiries

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for startup help or expanding businesses. The sense we're getting is people are optimistic and planning ahead for Spring/Summer. In regards to Town Meetings, we typically attend 15 or so in a day. This year it's a different challenge – every town has a different process.

XIII. Chamber Update:

- a. Ethan: Exciting times – we had our first full Board meeting, 11 board members. Priorities are enhancing our member benefits package. Our membership base is slowly climbing (up to 128 members from 75 in November) I have prioritized reaching out to people. Making sure our Newsletters have all relevant COVID info and are getting out so we can be the best resource during these times. We do have a part time marketing/events coordinator position posted right now. Our PPP loan came through so we are working on financials and we are solid for the next year which is exciting. We have a winter/spring brochure in a smaller version than usual arriving Friday. Should be a great resource for our visitors. Building a comprehensive business directory for Southern VT as a resource and also as something we can integrate into our website. We are sending out bids for our website redesign. Working on budget for that.

XIV. Moover Update:

- a. *(Welcome Christine as a voting member)* Christine: This week Medicaid transportation is back for the first time since 2017 which is a big undertaking. We've been very busy and navigating staff challenges and changes.

XV. Next meeting March 4.

XVI. Motion to adjourn by Gretchen at 9:02 am, seconded by Vicki.

Respectfully submitted,

Shannon Wheeler
Economic Development, Town of Dover